

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
----- 114762

O 151600Z OCT 75 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8549
INFO AMCON BELIZE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
US MISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 359
USCINCSO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 5673

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PBOR GT BH UK
SUBJECT: BELIZE DISPUTE: AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT
OCTOBER 14

REF: BELIZE 670

SUMMARY: IN 75-MINUTE CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR, PRESIDENT AND FONMIN EXPRESSED THEIR DEEP CONCERN OVER WHAT THEY TERMED "ARROGANT, INSULTING, OVERBEARING" ATTITUDE OF FOREIGN SECRETARY CALLAGHAN IN HIS SEPTEMBER 25 MEETING WITH FONMIN MOLINA WHICH THEY FEARED WOULD MAKE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF BELIZE PROBLEM UNATTAINABLE. PRESIDENT REPEATEDLY ASSURED AMBASSADOR OF HIS URGENT DESIRE TO AVOID MILITARY CONFLICT OVER BELIZE, BUT FEARED THAT HMG ATTITUDE EFFECTIVELY CLOSED DOOR TO NEGOTIATION AND PORTENDED "IMMINENT" GRANT OF INDEPENDENCE TO BELIZE. PRESIDENT RENEWED PLEA FOR US MEDIATION. HE HAD RECEIVED (EXAGGERATED) REPORTS OF BRITISH HELICOPTERS AND ADDITIONAL TROOPS BEING DELIVERED TO BELIZE AND SAID HE WAS THEREFORE ORDERING ADDITIONAL GUATEMALAN TROOPS TO BASE AT POPTUN 15 MILES FROM BORDER. HE BELIEVED HE MUST RESPOND MILITARILY TO ANY MILITARY BUILD-UP BY OTHER SIDE, AND IF UK PERSISTS IN ATTITUDE SHOWN BY CALLAGHAN IN NEW YORK IT WOULD LEAVE GOG WITH NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO USE FORCE. END SUMMARY.

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1. AMBASSADOR WAS ASKED TO CALL ON PRESIDENT LAUGERUD, ACCOM-

PANIED BY FONMIN MOLINA, AT 6:30 P., OCTOBER 14. CONVERSATION IN PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE LASTED 75 MINUTES. ATMOSPHERE WAS FRIENDLY. FRANK AND DEADLY SERIOUS.

2. PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD ASKED AMBASSADOR TO CALL IN ORDER FOR FONMIN TO BRIEF AMBASSADOR ON MOLINA'S SEPTEMBER 25 MEETING WITH FOREIGN SECRETARY CALLAGHAN AT UNGA WHICH HAD CAUSED GOG GREAT CONCERN. PRESIDENT SAID CLEARLY AND FIRMLY THAT HE DID NOT WANT MILITARY CONFLICT OVER BELIZE; PROBLEM WAS A CENTURY OLD AND THIS WAS TIME TO THINK COLDLY, DISPASSIONATELY, "WITH HEAD AND NOT WITH HEART." HE WAS DOING EVERYTHING HE COULD TO AVOID SITUATION THAT WOULD LEAD TO CONFLICT. HE HAD NOT HELD HIS REGULAR PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THREE MONTHS BECAUSE HE KNEW PRESS WOULD RAISE BELIZE DISPUTE AND HE DID NOT WISH TO SAY ANYTHING THAT MIGHT MAKE MATTERS WORSE. HE HAD ORDERED GUATEMALAN TROOPS REGULARLY STATIONED IN THE PETEN TO WITHDRAW WELL BACK FROM THE BORDER IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY POSSIBILITY OF INCIDENT OR OF A CONFLICT BEING INITIATED INADVERTENTLY OR BY PROVOCATION FROM THE BELIZE SIDE. FONMIN'S GENERAL DEBATE SPEECH AT UNGA, IN ACCORDANCE WITH HIS INSTRUCTIONS, HAD BEEN CALM AND REASONABLE AND HAD STRESSED GUATEMALAN INTEREST IN PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. BUT BOTH PRESIDENT AND FONMIN HAD BEEN DEEPLY DISTURBED BY "ARROGANT, INSULTING, OVERBEARING" ATTITUDE OF CALLAGHAN IN MEETING CALLAGHAN HAD SOUGHT WITH MOLINA.

3. PRESIDENT THEN ASKED FONMIN TO RECOUNT CONVERSATION WITH CALLAGHAN, AND IN ADDITION GAVE AMBASSADOR COPY OF MEMCON PREPARED BY GUATEMALAN DELEGATE SKINNER-KLEE (POUCHED DEPT). PRESIDENT SUMMED IT UP BY SAYING CALLAGHAN HAD SAID THERE WAS GOING TO BE A UNGA RESOLUTION CALLING FOR INDEPENDENCE OF BELIZE AND UK WOULD VOTE FOR IT. UK TRYING TO GIVE BELIZE INDEPENDENCE, UK WANTED TO GIVE BELIZE INDEPENDENCE, AND INDEPENDENCE IN IMMINENT (WORD PRESIDENT REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES). THAT COULD MEAN TOMORROW, NEXT WEEK, NEXT MONTH. THAT MEANS INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT SETTLEMENT WITH GUATEMALA AND GOG CANNOT ACCEPT THAT. WHAT ARE POSSIBILITIES OF ARRIVING AT A REASONABLE, NEGOTIATED SOLUTION, PRESIDENT ASKED, IF THIS IS ATTITUDE AND THESE ARE INTENTIONS OF THE TOP BRITISH POLICYMAKER. IF THERE IS NO HOPE FOR PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, GOG WILL BE FORCED "TO ACT WITH HONOR AND BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS ACTS BEFORE HISTORY."

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3. AMBASSADOR ASKED MOLINA IF CALLAGHAN HAD ACTUALLY USED WORD "IMMINENT." FONMIN SAID CALLAGHAN HAD SAID RESOLUTION WOULD CALL FOR INDEPENDENCE AND THAT UK WOULD SUPPORT THIS AND HAD STRESSED THAT UK POSITION WAS FIRM AND IRREVERSIBLE. WHOLE IMPLICATION OF CALLAGHAN'S REMARKS WAS THAT INDEPENDENCE WAS IMMINENT. HOWEVER, DESPITE FURTHER PROBING BY AMBASSADOR, FONMIN DID NOT CONFIRM USE OF WORD IMMINENT. (NEITHER DOES

MEMCON. MEMCON QUOTES CALLAGHAN AS SAYING BELIZE IS READY FOR DINDEPENDENCE AND UK IS PREPARED GIVE IT, AND THAT INDEPENDENCE OF BELIZE "IS INTERNAL AFFAIR OF GREAT BRITAIN AND THE COMMONWEALTH." THERE IS NOT, HOWEVER, ANY MENTION OF TIMING.)

5. PRESIDENT THEN READ TO AMBASSADOR TWO REPORTS HE HAD RECEIVED SHORTLY BEFORE MEETING CONCERNING ALLEGED BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS IN BELIZE. REPORTS REFERRED TO DATES IN SEPTEMBER AND COVERED RECENT DAYS AS WELL AND WERE VERY DETAILED, LISTING NUMBERS OF PLANES ARRIVING ON VARIOUS DATES AND QUANTITIES OF MUNITIONS AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS UNLOADED. ON OCTOBER 12 TWO HELICOPTERS, DISASSEMBLED, AND 60 TROOPS HAD BEEN LANDED. IN ADDITION, "BRITISH FRIGATE OF ZULU CLASS" HAD HURRIEDLY LEFT FORT LAUDERDALE, A SECOND SHIP HAD LEFT ENGLAND AND A THIRD WAS ON ITS WAY FROM JAMAICA, ALL TO BELIZE. FINALLY, GOG AWARE THAT UK PLANNED TO MOVE AN ENTIRE DIVISION OF ADDITIONAL TROOPS TO BELIZE, BRIGADE BY BRIGADE, "OSTENSIBLY FOR JUNGLE WARFARE TRAINING."

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
----- 114343

O 151600Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8550

INFO AMCONSUL BELIZE IMMEDIATE

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TC/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 332

USMISSION USUN NY IMMEDIATE

USCINCSO IMMEDIATE

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EXDIS

6. PRESIDENT REITERATED THAT HE WISHED TO AVOID ARMED CONFLICT. HE HAD PERSONALLY MET WITH ENTIRE GUATEMALAN OFFICER CORPS-HALF ON OCT 3 AND HALF ON OCT 10- AND HAD HAD VICE FONMIN (THEN

ACTING FONMIN) OBIOLS BRIEF THEM ON HISTORY OF DISPUTE AND OF EFFORTS FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. OFFICERS WERE BECOMING VERY IMPATIENT AND HE HAD WANTED THEM TO UNDERSTAND MORE OF BACKGROUND AND WHY IT WAS IMPORTANT TO BE PATIENT AND CALM. BUT HE COULD NOT SIT WITH ARMS FOLDED WHILE BRITISH REINFORCED. NEWS OF REINFORCEMENTS, PARTICULARLY OF HELICOPTERS, WOULD VERY SOON LEAK TO GUATEMALAN PRESS. THEREFORE ON OCT 15 PRESIDENT WOULD ORDER "ADDITIONAL FORCES" (UNSPECIFIED) MOVED TO POPTUN MILITARY BASE (15 MILES FROM BORDER). THEY WOULD STILL BE KEPT WELL BACK FROM BORDER. "BUT IF BRITISH LEAVE US WITH NO ALTERNATIVE TO FORCE, WE WILL USE IT."

7. AMBASSADOR SAID HE HAD RECEIVED REPORT THAT AFTERNOON (REFTEL) FROM US CONGEN IN BELIZE, WHO HAD SEEN WITH HIS OWN EYES EXACTLY WHAT WAS BEING DELIVERED TO BRITISH FORCES. SIX C-130'S HAD LANDED
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OCT 12 WITH THREE DISASSEMBLED HELICOPTERS AND ABOUT 50 TECHNICIANS AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL TO ASSEMBLE THEM. ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS ON THE OTHER HAND HAD BEEN AT AIRPORT FOR A LONG TIME; THEY WERE BROUGHT OUT PERIODICALLY, AND HAD BEEN AGAIN LAST WEEKEND, FOR DRILL. THERE WERE NO OTHER SHIPMENTS OF NEW EQUIPMENT OR MUNITIONS OTHER THAN ROUTINE RESUPPLY.

8. AMBASSADOR SAID BRITISH WERE UNDOUBTEDLY REACTING TO PUBLIC GUATEMALAN STATEMENTS CALLING FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE. HE HAD RECOMMENDED AGAINST ANY MOVEMENT BY UK OF NEW EQUIPMENT OR TROOPS INTO BELIZE PRECISELY BECAUSE OF DANGER OF MISINTERPRETATION. PERSONALLY, AND NOT RPT NOT SPEAKING FOR USG, HE THOUGHT IT HAD BEEN GREAT MISTAKE FOR BRITISH TO DO SO. BUT WHAT WILL REACTION IN BELIZE BE WHEN NEW GUATEMALAN TROOPS MOVE INTO POPTUN? OUR CONSUL GENERAL REPORTED CIRCULATION OF RUMOR IN BELIZE THAT GOG HAD 30,000 TROOPS POISED ON THE BORDER. PRESIDENT LAUGHED, AND SAID US KNEW GUATEMALA DID NOT EVEN HAVE 30,000 TROOPS, LET ALONE THAT MANY NEAR BELIZE. AMBASSADOR SAID HE KNEW IT, THE PRESIDENT KNEW IT, AND BRITISH KNEW IT, BUT IT'S WHAT BELIZEAN OFFICIALS AND PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT PRODUCES DEMANDS ON BRITISH FOR PROTECTION. HE HOPED THAT BEFORE ORDERING NEW TROOPS TO POPTUN PRESIDENT WOULD CONSIDER THAT EVERY MILITARY MOVEMENT BY ONE SIDE IS LIKELY TO BE MIS-INTERPRETED AND WILL BRING A REACTION FROM THE OTHER.

IT WOULD BE MOST UNFORTUNATE IF BRITISH MOVE STILL MORE TROOPS INTO BELIZE IN REACTION TO NEWH7-53.-),
.9;3. THINGS CAN EASILY GET OUT OF HAND, AS THEY DID IN 1972, WHEN MISINTERPRETATIONS AND EXAGGERATED REPORTS ON BOTH SIDES LED TO CRISIS WHICH ONLY FACTUAL REPORT BY OAS OBSERVER COULD DEFUSE. IT WAS WELL TO BEAR EXAMPLE OF 1972 IN MIND IN THIS CASE.

9. AGAIN, EMPHASIZING HE WAS SPEAKING PERSONALLY, AMBASSADOR SAID HE THOUGHT THERE MIGHT POSSIBLY BE ELEMENTS IN BRITISH COUNCILS, EXASPERATED AND IMPATIENT TO GET OUT OF BELIZE, WHO WOULD NOT BE
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AVERSE TO SEEING GUATEMALA MOVE INTO BELIZE; THEY WOULD NOT SEEK IT, BUT THEY WOULD MAKE NO REAL EFFORT TO AVOID CONFLICT. IF IT OCCURRED, UK COULD THEN ASK UN TO CALL FOR CEASEFIRE AND MUTUAL WITHDRAWAL OF FORCES. GUATEMALANS WOULD BE FORCED TO WITHDRAW AND UK WOULD GLADLY DO SO. PRESIDENT INTERJECTED THAT THE SAME THOUGHT HAD OCCURRED TO HIM. AMBASSADOR CONTINUED THAT IN THIS EVENT THIRD WORLD-DOMINATED UN WOULD HAVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BELIZE INCLUDING ITS DEFENSE, AND UK WOULD HAVE FINALLY CUT ITSELF LOOSE FROM BURDEN IT CAN ILL AFFORD AND WANTS BADLY TO BE RID OF. IN AMBASSADOR'S VIEW, THIS WOULD BE WORST POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT FOR GUATEMALA. ARMED FORCES WOULD BE HUMILIATED, FORCED TO WITHDRAW, GUATEMALAN ECONOMY AND PRESIDENT'S EFFORTS TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT WOULD BE DISRUPTED. PRESIDENT KNEW BETTER THAN HE THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES FOR GOG AND FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY OF GUATEMALA OF SUCH A SITUATION.

10. PRESIDENT AGAIN SAID HE WOULD DO EVERYTHING HE COULD TO PREVENT CONFLICT, BUT DID NOT SEE HOW HE COULD AVOID REINFORCEMENT OF POPTUN. AMBASSADOR SAID HE WAS STILL HOPEFUL THAT REASONABLE, HONORABLE COMPROMISE COULD BE WORKED OUT. PRESIDENT SAID THAT WAS WHY HE HAD ASKED, AND HE ASKED AGAIN, FOR US MEDIATION. SECRETARY KISSINGER HAD WORKED A MIRACLE IN MUCH MORE DIFFICULT MIDDLE EASTERN SITUATION. THIS WAS TIME FOR US TO STEP IN. AMBASSADOR SAID THAT MIDDLE EAST HAD SHOWN THAT FOR MEDIATION TO BE SUCCESSFUL BOTH SIDES MUST WANT PEACEFUL SOLUTION AND BE PREPARED TO MAKE REAL SACRIFICES. HE WAS NOT SURE DESIRE IS STRONG ENOUGH IN BELIZE DISPUTE ON EITHER SIDE. IF THERE IS TO BE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, BOTH SIDES WILL HAVE TO GIVE UP THINGS THEY

WOULD PREFER TO HAVE. IF UK AND GUATEMALA CAN WORK
SOMETHING OUT, TWO-THIRDS OF PROBLEM WILL HAVE BEEN SOLVED.
IT WOULD THEN, IN AMBASSADOR'S VIEW, BE
SQUARELY UP TO BRITISH TO BRING THE THIRD PARTY
INTO LINE. THE IMPRESSIONS GATHERED BY THE PARTICI-
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PANTS IN THE CALLAGHAN-MOLINA CONVERSATION WERE NOT
NECESSARILY THE LAST WORD, AND HE URGED PRESIDENT
NOT TO GIVE UP HOPE.

11. COMMENT: WE BELIEVE PRESIDENT WAS SINCERE.
HOWEVER BAD THE SPECIFICS OF HIS INTELLIGENCE
REPORTS, HE IS CONVINCED UK HAS UNDERTAKEN OR IS
UNDERTAKING A MAJOR MILITARY BUILDUP, AND OUR
REPORTS HAVE ONLY PARTIALLY REASSURED HIM. THESE
REPORTS, ON TOP OF CALLAGHAN CONVERSATION WHICH
BADLY FRIGHTENED GOG, HAVE COME CLOSE TO TURNING
FRUSTRATION AT TIP LEVEL OF GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT
INTO DESPERATION.
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